

VZCZCXRO6298
RR RUEHPA
DE RUEHJL #0015 0091641
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 091641Z JAN 06
FM AMEMBASSY BANJUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6297
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP

UNCLAS BANJUL 000015

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KMCA](#) [GA](#)
SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: OPPOSITION HOLDS RALLY

REF: A. BANJUL 4 AND PREVIOUS

[B](#). BANJUL 11

OPPOSITION COALITION STAGES PUBLIC RALLY

[1](#). (SBU) Per ref a, representative of opposition coalition, National Alliance for Democracy and Development (NADD), told us January 4 of NADD's plan to stage an outdoor mass rally January 7, but expressed doubt that authorities would give the required authorization. Ambassador subsequently raised the matter with the Interior Minister, who gave assurances that a permit to hold the event would be granted and that no restrictions would be imposed. (Note: NADD had recently decided against holding a rally when authorities denied use of sound amplification equipment. End note.) The Minister proved true to his word, as NADD's event occurred -- with microphones -- as scheduled January 7 in the Banjul suburb of Serrekunda.

[2](#). (SBU) FSN employee attended the three-hour rally and reported that it unfolded peacefully; there was no noticeable police presence. The rally attracted a respectable crowd, estimated at 4,000, who represented a wide cross-section of Gambian society and were addressed by a series of opposition figures. The speakers, with an eye to the 2006-7 Presidential and National Assembly elections, covered an array of topics. Besides expressing solidarity with the three previously detained NADD leaders currently free on bail, the speakers criticized the GOTG's economic policies as insufficient to bring about sustainable development and poverty reduction. They also focused on President Jammeh's end-of-year television interview (ref b), denouncing, in particular, his "threat" that, if necessary, he would "kill 20,000 Gambians in order to save 1.5 million Gambians" and then "go to sleep" (i.e. his sleep would not be troubled at having to perform this deed).

COMMENT

[3](#). (SBU) The GOTG's decision to permit NADD to hold the rally without restrictions was a positive development, as was the absence of trouble-making by the police or provocateurs associated with Jammeh's ruling APRC party. As reported ref a, the NADD rep informed us that NADD also plans to hold a rally January 21 in the western town of Brikama and will serve as a further test of the GOTG's willingness to permit the opposition to take its message -- whether on the upcoming elections or the case of the three NADD leaders facing trial -- to the public END COMMENT
STAFFORD